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FROM USMISSION TO UNESCO PARIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM UNESCO OEXC SCUL

SUBJECT: UNESCO: N. SCOTT MOMADAY DISCUSSES CULTURAL PRESERVATION

**¶11. SUMMARY.** UNESCO's Social and Human Sciences Division of Foresight, Philosophy and Human Sciences hastily organized a June 22 symposium on human dignity and art with N. Scott Momaday, UNESCO Artist for Peace and Native American poet, novelist, painter, and story-teller, which focused on the importance of cultural heritage. Momaday was in Paris for the opening of the French Quai de Branly Museum of indigenous art and culture. His work focuses on the preservation of indigenous culture, and outreach to indigenous youths who find it difficult to hold on to their cultural identities in modern society. To take advantage of Momaday's presence, Mission also organized a lunch in his honor, where Momaday spoke on the importance of his relationship with UNESCO in addressing the plight of indigenous youth worldwide and the significance of its neutral platform. Mission would recommend Momaday to posts worldwide as a gifted speaker and excellent source of information on Native American culture. END SUMMARY.

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MOMADAY ON INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND UNESCO:  
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**¶12.** At lunch, Momaday discussed his work with UNESCO and Native American culture in general. Momaday and a French Anthropologist in attendance explained that he first engaged with UNESCO to participate in a 2001 UNESCO Seminar on Indigenous Identities, Oral Written Expressions and New Technologies, which is where he met Katerina Stenou, director of the office of cultural policies. Momaday commented that his status as UNESCO Artist for Peace brought three key benefits: the UNESCO neutral platform enabled him to conduct outreach to indigenous youth in countries such as Russia, where he might not otherwise have access. UNESCO also put him in contact with an existing network of indigenous experts, and UNESCO was partnering with him on an archive project with a Native American tribe in Oklahoma. In Russia, Momaday stated that indigenous youths in Siberia face similar challenges to Native American youths in terms of connecting their contemporary identity with their culture and history. Story telling, he commented, helps these young people to learn about their heritage and past history.

**¶13.** UNESCO staff expressed to Mission privately in advance of the lunch that Momaday's wife had told them he opposed the Cultural Diversity Convention. However, when asked about the Convention at lunch, Momaday answered vaguely that he thought its significance was important and that UNESCO does an excellent job on cultural issues in general.

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HUMAN DIGNITY AND ART:  
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**¶14.** At the June 22 symposium on Human Dignity and Art, Momaday discussed how ethnologists, anthropologists and ordinary citizens can better approach native cultures today. The audience was moved by the youth leader who described the difficulties of growing up as an Inuit and trying to grasp his identity while society changed around him. Debate focused on how different cultural groups distinguish themselves as "superior" or "inferior" in relation to others. (COMMENT: Although no one specifically mentioned colonialism, the European anthropologists were clearly grappling with its legacy and how experts from industrialized nations could engage with indigenous cultures without stealing something from them. END COMMENT.)

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FUTURE ENDEAVORS WITH MOMADAY:  
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**¶15.** Momaday expressed interest in the World Digital Library initiative, and he asked to be put in touch with the U.S. Library of Congress. He also noted that he would be in Russia this August and was interested in contacting the American Embassy in Moscow. Mission notes that Momaday is an excellent speaker, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, expert on Native American culture, and a thoroughly devoted advocate of cultural heritage. Mission hopes to welcome him again to UNESCO in the future and would encourage other posts to consider him as a speaker. More information on Momaday can be found at:

UNESCO Artist for Peace:

Please google Scott Momaday and UNESCO Artist for Peace, as Mission clout system cannot exceed 55 characters without a space or a

return, making it impossible to send the url.

Buffalo Trust:  
<http://www.buffalotrust.org/scott.htm>

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